

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF CREATIVE ARTS AND MEDIA
REED SCHOOL OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

M.S.J. GRADUATE PROGRAM HANDBOOK

Master of Science in Journalism



2026–2027 ACADEMIC YEAR

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1. Welcome and Purpose of the Handbook

1.1 Welcome to the M.S.J. Program

Welcome to the Master of Science in Journalism program in the Reed School of Media and Communications at West Virginia University. This handbook is intended to help you navigate the program, understand key requirements and procedures, and identify the people and resources available to support you throughout your graduate study.

We are thrilled to welcome you to the School and program and look forward to supporting your academic and professional development.

Learn more about the M.S.J. program's scope, structure and degree paths in [Section 2](#).

1.2 Purpose and Intended Audience

This handbook is intended primarily for current and new M.S.J. students. It also serves as a reference for faculty members, committee chairs, graduate assistants and others who support students in the program.

The handbook brings together key information about program requirements, advising, degree planning, academic progress, culminating experiences, forms, approvals and important procedures. Its purpose is to help students understand how the M.S.J. program operates, what is expected of them and where to seek guidance throughout their graduate study.

1.3 Relationship to Official WVU Policies

This handbook supplements, but does not replace, official West Virginia University policies, procedures and academic requirements. Students are responsible for following the current WVU Graduate Catalog, university policies, academic calendars and requirements established by the Office of Graduate Education and Life, the Office of the University Registrar and other appropriate university offices.

When University policy and this guidebook address the same subject, the official University policy governs. Program requirements and procedures described in this guidebook are intended to explain how University requirements are implemented within the M.S.J. program. Because policies, deadlines and procedures may change, students should use the links provided throughout the guidebook and consult the graduate academic adviser or graduate program director when clarification is needed.

1.4 How to Use this Handbook

Students should use this handbook as an ongoing reference, rather than reviewing it only at the beginning or end of the program. It is organized to help students locate information about advising, degree requirements, academic milestones, culminating experience options, special academic experiences, forms, approvals and graduation procedures.

Students are encouraged to:

- Review the handbook at the beginning of each academic year.
- Consult it before making decisions about courses, degree plans or culminating experiences.
- Use the forms, checklists and timelines provided throughout the guidebook.
- Follow links to official WVU policies and procedures when additional detail is needed.
- Contact the graduate academic adviser, graduate program director, committee chair or appropriate University office when questions arise.

The handbook will be reviewed and updated, as needed, each academic year. Students should use the most recent version distributed by the program.

2. M.S.J. Program Overview

2.1 Program Description and Goals

Established in 1961, the Master of Science in Journalism program has a longstanding history of graduate education in journalism and related media and communication fields. The program has evolved alongside changes in journalism, media technology and the fields of strategic communication, advertising and public relations while maintaining an emphasis on rigorous inquiry, ethical practice, professional development and individualized faculty guidance.

Today, the M.S.J. program prepares students for research, professional practice and leadership in journalism, media and strategic communication. The program is designed to help students strengthen their ability to analyze communication problems, conduct research, produce high-quality scholarly or professional work, and apply ethical, evidence-based decision-making in a rapidly changing media environment.

The program supports students with varied academic backgrounds, professional interests and career goals. Through graduate coursework and a culminating experience, students develop advanced knowledge and skills relevant to professional practice, applied work, research and continued graduate study.

2.2 Degree Structure at a Glance

The M.S.J. is a 30-credit-hour degree that students typically complete in two years of full-time study. Students complete a combination of required core courses, approved electives and a culminating experience aligned with their academic and professional goals.

The official curriculum and degree requirements are published in the WVU Graduate Catalog. Students should use the catalog, DegreeWorks and their approved plan of study to monitor progress toward degree completion. Students can also consult with the graduate academic adviser with questions regarding their degree progress.

All students complete one of three culminating experience options:

- Thesis
- Professional project
- Coursework with comprehensive exams

Most students complete either the thesis or professional project option. The thesis is the traditional master's culminating experience and emphasizes original scholarly research addressing a significant journalism, media or strategic communication question or problem. The professional project emphasizes substantial applied work informed by research to address a professional problem, need or opportunity. The coursework-with-comprehensive-exams option includes additional approved coursework and written and oral comprehensive examinations. Additional guidance about the three options is provided in [Section 7](#).

2.3 Areas of Emphasis, Flexible Course Planning and Professional Engagement

Beyond the required core, the program offers formal Areas of Emphasis (AOEs) and flexible course options that allow students to build an individualized plan of study supporting their professional and educational goals, research interests, and potential thesis or professional project topics. Students who complete the requirements for an approved AOE will have that Area of Emphasis listed on their

transcript. Current AOE's and additional guidance about incorporating an AOE into the plan of study are provided in [Section 5.3](#).

Students also may have opportunities to engage with professional organizations, campus and external media outlets, community partners and other professional settings through coursework, internships, independent studies, applied projects, research, events and related program activities.

Some individualized academic experiences require advance approval, faculty supervision, program forms or specific registration procedures. Requirements for internships, independent studies and teaching practica are explained in [Section 6](#).

Students work with the graduate academic adviser and graduate program director to select courses and experiences that support their goals while meeting program and university requirements. Because the availability of particular courses and experiences may vary by semester, students should review upcoming offerings when available and discuss their options with the graduate academic adviser and, when applicable, their committee chair.

Throughout the program, students are expected to demonstrate timely and satisfactory academic progress, professional conduct and active engagement with faculty and advisers, compliance with program requirements. Students are responsible for reviewing official University policies, consulting regularly with the graduate academic adviser and graduate program director and completing required milestones by the applicable deadlines.

3. Getting Started in the Program

Beginning graduate study involves learning both the academic expectations of the M.S.J. program and the University systems used to manage enrollment, communication and degree progress. The following information is intended to help students complete essential first-semester steps and identify where to seek guidance.

3.1 New Student Quick-start Checklist

New M.S.J. students should complete the following steps at the beginning of the program:

- Confirm that you can access the [WVU Portal](#) and its key student systems, including MIX email, STAR, eCampus and DegreeWorks.
- Regularly check your WVU MIX email account.
- Attend M.S.J. graduate orientation and any required University, College, School or graduate assistantship onboarding sessions.
- Review this handbook and the [official M.S.J. curriculum in the WVU Graduate Catalog](#), and consult with the graduate academic adviser regarding any differences in course numbering or current offerings.
- Review DegreeWorks to become familiar with your degree requirements and current progress.
- Meet with the graduate academic adviser to discuss course selection, registration and your academic and professional goals.
- Work with the graduate academic adviser to develop and complete a plan of study by the end of the second semester, typically while enrolled in JRL 520. The adviser will document the completed plan through the program's designated process for graduate program director approval.
- Become familiar with the roles of the graduate academic adviser, graduate program director and, for students pursuing a thesis or professional project, the committee chair.
- Review the three culminating experience options: thesis, professional project and coursework with comprehensive exams.
- Begin considering how Areas of Emphasis, electives and other academic experiences may support your professional and educational goals and potential culminating experience.
- Become familiar with program forms, approval processes and major deadlines.
- Save the contact information for the graduate program director, graduate academic adviser and office administrator.
- Ask questions early when you are uncertain about degree requirements, registration, forms or program procedures.

3.2 Orientation and First-semester Expectations

New students are expected to participate in M.S.J. Graduate Student Orientation and should attend any required University, College, School or graduate assistantship onboarding activities. Orientation introduces students to the program, faculty, academic expectations, advising resources, university systems and available professional-development opportunities. The orientation typically takes place the day before the start of the fall semester. Students are advised to check their MIX email for communication about the orientation from the graduate program director and for other important announcements.

During the first semester, students should begin developing a clear understanding of the degree structure and their individual academic goals. This includes reviewing the required core curriculum,

exploring Areas of Emphasis and elective options, and becoming familiar with the three culminating experience paths. Students are not expected to finalize every aspect of their plan of study during the first semester, but they should begin discussing course selection, professional interests and possible thesis, professional project or comprehensive examination goals with the graduate academic adviser.

Students should also become familiar with the expectations for timely and satisfactory progress, academic integrity, professional conduct and regular communication with faculty and program personnel. Questions about courses, registration, preliminary degree planning or creating a plan of study should generally be directed first to the graduate academic adviser. Questions involving program policy, culminating experience requirements, plan-of-study approval or significant changes to a student's academic direction should be discussed with the graduate program director.

Students are responsible for monitoring university and program communications, meeting published deadlines and seeking guidance when questions arise. Waiting until a registration, graduation or program deadline has passed may limit the options available to resolve a problem.

3.3 WVU Email, DegreeWorks and Registration Basics

WVU MIX Email

WVU MIX email is the official student email system and should be checked regularly. Program announcements, course communications, university notices, registration information and deadline reminders may be sent to a student's MIX account. Students are responsible for reviewing messages sent to that account and maintaining access to it.

Students should use their WVU email account when communicating about university or program matters. Students who experience problems accessing MIX email or other WVU systems should consult the [Technology Services Student Resources page](#) or contact the [ITS Service Desk](#) for assistance.

DegreeWorks

DegreeWorks is WVU's degree-auditing and academic-planning system. It provides students and advisers with a visual checklist of completed coursework and remaining degree requirements and is accessed through the WVU Portal.

Students should review DegreeWorks regularly to monitor their academic progress and identify possible discrepancies. DegreeWorks is an important advising and planning tool, but it does not replace the approved plan of study, the official Graduate Catalog or guidance from the graduate academic adviser and graduate program director.

A course may not automatically appear in the expected location in DegreeWorks, particularly when substitutions, approved electives, transfer credit, individualized coursework or Accelerated Bachelor's-to-Master's (ABM) enrollment are involved. Students in the ABM (4+1) program should be especially careful to review DegreeWorks with the graduate academic adviser because their undergraduate and graduate requirements may appear differently during the transition into full graduate status. Students should report apparent errors or omissions to the graduate academic adviser rather than assuming that a requirement has been completed or waived.

Course Registration Basics

Students review available class offerings and register for courses via STAR, which is accessed through the [WVU Portal](#). **Before registering**, students should review the available course schedule and book

an advising appointment with Graduate Academic Adviser Aaron Hawley via his [appointment scheduling link](#).

Students should meet with the graduate academic adviser before registration opens to discuss classes, review their proposed schedule, confirm that selected courses apply to the degree, and address any course permits or approvals needed for registration. They should also review WVU's published pre-registration priority dates and register as soon as their assigned registration period opens.

Students are responsible for ensuring that their selected courses apply appropriately to the M.S.J. degree and support their approved or developing plan of study. Enrollment in a course does not, by itself, guarantee that the course will apply toward the degree.

Permissions and Approvals: Some courses and individualized academic experiences require advance permission, an approved form or authorization before registration. These may include internships, professional field experiences, teaching practica, independent studies, thesis or professional project credits, and other individualized academic experiences. Students should begin these approval processes early and should not assume that permission can be granted after the registration or program deadline. Requirements, approval processes and forms for these experiences are explained in [Section 6](#).

Students should consult the [official University academic calendar](#), [Enrollment section](#) of the graduate catalog, and [Registrar's Add/Drop Dates site](#) for [pre-registration priority dates](#), add/drop deadlines, and [withdrawal policies and deadlines](#). Courses dropped after the add/drop period may appear as a "W" on the student's transcript, depending on the timing of the withdrawal. Students should notify the graduate academic adviser whenever they plan to add or drop a course. Students are responsible for meeting all applicable registration and withdrawal deadlines. Program personnel can provide guidance, but official university deadlines and policies govern.

3.4 Key Contacts and Roles

M.S.J. students work with several program contacts and university offices throughout their graduate studies. The following table identifies the appropriate first contact for common questions, procedures and support needs.

Table 1. Who Do I Contact?

Question or Need	First Contact	Contact Information	Notes
Primary Program Contacts			
Course selection, registration, degree planning, and plan of study development or revision	Aaron Hawley, graduate academic adviser	Email: aaron.hawley@mail.wvu.edu Office phone: 304-293-3133 Schedule advising appointment link	Consult before registration, before changing planned coursework and when reviewing DegreeWorks or degree progress. Students develop and revise the plan of study with the graduate academic adviser. The completed plan is documented for graduate program director approval.
Program policy or culminating experience requirements, plan of study approval, academic progress concerns, program-level exceptions	Rita Colistra, Ph.D., graduate program director & associate director	Email: rita.colistra@mail.wvu.edu Office phone: 304-293-8792	Approves completed plans of study and significant changes; provides program-level guidance on policies, culminating experience requirements, academic progress concerns and exceptions.
Thesis or professional project development	Committee chair	Contact information provided by chair	Guides proposal development, final work, committee coordination and defense preparation.
Internship form questions or MDIA 441 Internship enrollment	Anjelica Trinone, teaching assistant professor	Email: atrinone@mail.wvu.edu	Reviews and approves MDIA 441 Internship forms and enrollment requests; evaluates and grades internship work.
Graduation application or requirement checks, payroll questions or administrative support	Brenda Sisler, office administrator	Email: brenda.sisler@mail.wvu.edu Office phone: 304-293-2250	Assists with program-level graduation checks, School payroll and related administrative questions.
Graduate assistantship duties, schedule, performance or contract questions	Graduate assistantship supervisor; Jodie Lewis for contract questions	Supervisor contact information provided with appointment; Jodie Lewis: jodie.lewis@mail.wvu.edu	Contact the supervisor about work assignments, scheduling, expectations and evaluation. Contact Jodie Lewis about contract documentation.
Relevant University Offices and Services			
Billing, student account, financial aid or university financial questions	WVU Hub	WVU Hub Contact Us	Use official WVU Hub contact channels for billing, financial aid and student-account questions.
International student status, visa questions or employment authorization	ISSS	International Student and Scholar Services	Consult before beginning any employment or internship requiring authorization.
WVU login, MIX email, STAR, eCampus or other technology access problems	WVU ITS	WVU Information Technology Services Student Resources	Contact for help accessing WVU systems, accounts and technology services.
Official registration, withdrawal, academic calendar or graduation procedures	Office of the University Registrar	Office of the University Registrar	Use Registrar resources for official university dates, deadlines and procedures.
Disability-related accommodations or accessibility support	Office of Student Accommodations	Office of Student Accommodations	Contact for accommodation requests and accessibility-related support.

4. Advising, Plan of Study and Degree Planning

4.1 Academic Advising and Guidance Structure

M.S.J. students receive advising and guidance from several individuals throughout the program. The **graduate academic adviser** assists students with course selection, registration, degree planning and monitoring progress toward degree requirements. The **graduate program director** provides guidance on program policies and culminating experience options, approves individualized coursework requests, plans of study and subsequent changes, and oversees academic progress.

Students completing a thesis or professional project also work closely with a **committee chair**, who guides the development of the proposal, research or professional project, final written document and defense. Students completing the coursework with comprehensive exams option receive primary guidance on related coursework, directed study, exam procedures and timeline requirements from the graduate program director, with additional advising and registration support from the graduate academic adviser.

4.2 Student Responsibilities

Students are responsible for understanding their degree requirements, consulting with the appropriate program contact before making significant academic decisions, and completing required milestones by applicable deadlines. Students should meet with the graduate academic adviser as needed, review their academic progress regularly and seek approval before changing their coursework, Area of Emphasis, culminating experience track or approved plan of study.

4.3 Plan of Study

Each student must work with the graduate academic adviser to develop and document a plan of study for graduate program director approval no later than the end of the second semester of the first year of study. Students are encouraged to begin discussing their plan of study early in the program rather than waiting until the submission deadline.

The plan of study identifies the courses and culminating experience through which the student will complete the degree. It should support the student's professional and educational goals while meeting all program and university requirements.

Students considering significant changes to their approved coursework, Area of Emphasis or culminating experience track should first consult with the graduate academic adviser. Significant changes to the approved plan of study, including a change in the culminating experience option, must then be discussed with and approved by the graduate program director before the plan is revised.

4.4 DegreeWorks and Progress Monitoring

Students should review DegreeWorks regularly to monitor completed and remaining degree requirements. DegreeWorks is an important planning tool, but it does not replace the approved plan of study or advising guidance. Students should report any apparent discrepancies to the graduate academic adviser.

5. Degree Requirements, Curriculum and Progress Benchmarks

5.1 Degree Requirements at a Glance

The M.S. in Journalism requires a minimum of 30 graduate credit hours. Up to 12 credit hours of approved 400-level coursework may be applied toward the degree. Students must maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.75 and complete the coursework and culminating experience requirements associated with their chosen track. Students receiving scholarships, financial awards or other merit-based aid must maintain a minimum cumulative 3.0 GPA. More information about culminating experience tracks and related requirements is provided in [Section 7](#).

5.2 Core Curriculum and Course Sequencing

The M.S. in Journalism curriculum is typically completed over two academic years. The recommended sequence below reflects the program's current core-course structure and typical progression. Actual schedules may vary based on a student's Area of Emphasis, culminating experience track, course availability, approved plan of study, and graduate assistantship status.

Suggested Plan of Study

First Year			
Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours
JRL 504: <i>Mass Media & Society</i>	3	JRL 520: <i>Advanced Journalistic Writing & Research</i>	3
Electives	6	JRL 528: <i>Media Ethics & Law</i>	3
		Elective	3
Fall Semester Total	9	Spring Semester Total	9
Second Year			
Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours
JRL 697: <i>Research*</i> OR Elective**	3	JRL 697: <i>Research*</i> OR Elective or Approved Directed/Independent Study**	3
Elective	3	Elective	3
Fall Semester Total	6	Fall Semester Total	6

Total Credit Hours: 30

* **Thesis & Professional Project Tracks:** Students completing the thesis or professional project track must register for at least six credit hours of JRL 697 Research.

** **Coursework/Comprehensive Exams Track:** Students completing the coursework with comprehensive exams track do not register for JRL 697 because research credits do not apply to that option. Instead, they complete approved elective and/or directed/independent study coursework consistent with their approved plan of study and subject to graduate program director approval.

Electives: At least 18 of the 30 credits applied to the degree must be in courses numbered 500 or above.

Course numbers, titles and offerings may change, and some catalog listings may not reflect the program's most current course numbering or sequencing. Students should consult the current course schedule and work with the graduate academic adviser when planning registration.

The second-year sequence may vary. Some students complete nine credit hours in one semester and three in the other, depending on their culminating experience track, remaining degree requirements and approved plan of study.

Graduate Assistant Enrollment: Students holding graduate assistantships must maintain full-time enrollment as required by the University, which means at least nine credit hours in each fall and spring semester, even if those credits exceed the minimum 30 credit hours required for the degree. Additional information about graduate assistantship requirements is provided in [Section 8](#) and under [GA Eligibility and Enrollment Requirements](#) on the [WVU Graduate Education and Life website](#).

Accelerated B.S.J./M.S.J. Program (4+1)

Top-performing undergraduate students may enter the accelerated B.S.J./M.S.J. (4+1) program during their senior year, completing graduate-level coursework alongside their remaining undergraduate requirements before becoming full-time graduate students in the fifth year. Interested students must meet with their adviser and express their interest in the fall of their junior year or earlier.

The accelerated program's course sequence differs from the standard two-year M.S.J. plan because approved graduate coursework completed during the undergraduate portion of the accelerated program is applied toward both degrees. Students should consult the accelerated program webpage for eligibility requirements and additional information, follow the accelerated program requirements in the Graduate Catalog, and work closely with the graduate academic adviser to develop and monitor their individual plan of study. Both the B.S.J. and M.S.J. degrees are conferred upon completion of the M.S.J.

Typical Accelerated Program Sequence

The following provides a general overview of the accelerated program sequence. Individual course requirements may vary based on the student's undergraduate major and approved plan of study. Students should work closely with the graduate academic adviser to confirm required coursework and sequencing.

Year 4: Senior Year — Fall

- JRL 504: Mass Media and Society (3 credit hours)
- Additional approved graduate/shared coursework, as applicable
- Remaining undergraduate degree requirements

Year 4: Senior Year — Spring

- JRL 520: Advanced Journalistic Writing and Research (3 credit hours)
- Approved graduate elective coursework, as applicable
- Undergraduate capstone course
- Remaining undergraduate degree requirements

Year 5: Full-time Graduate Study — Fall

- JRL 697: Research (3 credit hours)
- Graduate electives (6 credit hours)

Year 5: Full-time Graduate Study — Spring

- JRL 697: Research (3 credit hours)
- Approved ethics course and remaining graduate coursework, as required by the approved plan of study

5.3 Areas of Emphasis and Elective Planning

An Area of Emphasis (AOE) is a focused curriculum within the M.S. in Journalism program that allows students to develop additional specialization in an area of interest. Choosing an AOE is optional. Students who pursue an AOE must complete two approved courses totaling six credit hours.

Completed Areas of Emphasis are noted on the student's transcript, but not on the diploma. Students may also choose to list a completed AOE on their resume or CV.

Students who plan to complete an AOE should begin discussing their options with the graduate academic adviser during their first semester, when possible. Not all courses are offered every semester, so students should plan ahead when selecting courses and developing their plan of study.

Current Areas of Emphasis include:

- **Advocacy and Public Interest Communication (APIC)**
Choose two approved courses (6 credits) from options including *Crisis Communication*, *Advocacy Communication*, *Interactive Media and Audience Building*, and *Public Interest Communication*.
- **Media Solutions and Innovation**
Choose two approved courses (6 credits) from options such as *Experimental Journalism*, *Documentary Storytelling*, and *Interactive Media and Audience Building*.
- **Reporting and Writing**
Choose two approved courses (6 credits) from options including *Investigative Reporting*, *Feature Writing*, and *Documentary Storytelling*.
- **Television**
Choose two approved courses (6 credits) from options such as *Advanced Video Reporting and Producing (WVU News)*, *Documentary Storytelling*, and *Public Affairs Reporting for Multimedia (WV Today)*.

Course offerings and eligible AOE courses may change. ***Students should consult the current course schedule and work with the graduate academic adviser for the most complete and current course options and AOE requirements.***

Multiple Areas of Emphasis: Students may pursue more than one AOE within the M.S. in Journalism. Normally, a [maximum of three credit hours may be shared](#) between AOE's within the same major. Applicability of specific courses to AOE requirements is determined by the program.

No AOE Route: Students are not required to complete an Area of Emphasis. Students who do not pursue an AOE may select approved electives that support their academic and professional goals and are consistent with their approved plan of study.

5.4 Year One and Year Two Progress Benchmarks

Students typically complete the degree in two years. General benchmarks for timely and satisfactory progress are outlined as follows. Detailed requirements and procedures for each culminating experience option are provided in [Section 7](#).

Year One

All Students: Students should work with the graduate academic adviser to develop and document a plan of study for graduate program director approval by the end of the second semester, typically while enrolled in JRL 520. By the end of the first year, all students, regardless of track, should have successfully completed all three core course requirements.

Thesis and Professional Project Tracks: By the end of the second semester, students should have completed a *preliminary* proposal, typically while enrolled in JRL 520, and identified and secured an advisory committee chair, subject to approval by the graduate program director to ensure fit and compliance with program and university graduate faculty requirements. Once the chair has agreed to

serve, the student notifies the graduate program director and graduate academic adviser via email (copy the chair).

Comprehensive Exams Track: By the end of the second semester, students should have an approved plan of study in place and meet with the graduate program director for guidance on year-two exam expectations, examining committee requirements and timeline.

Year Two

All Students: Students should successfully complete all remaining coursework and credit-hour requirements.

Thesis and Professional Project Tracks: As part of the plan of study, students are expected to identify and obtain approval for a committee chair by the end of Year One. If a committee chair has not been secured and approved by the end of Year One, students must complete this process within the first three weeks of the fall semester of Year Two. Students should form the remaining advisory committee in consultation with and approval from the committee chair prior to the proposal defense. Students should expect to spend a full semester developing the formal proposal under the direction of their approved committee chair and preparing for presentation and defense to their graduate advisory committee. The formal proposal should build upon the preliminary proposal developed in JRL 520 and be presented and defended during the semester prior to the student's planned graduation term (i.e., proposal defense during the first semester of the second year). Following a successful proposal defense, students should spend the final semester completing their thesis or professional project under the guidance and direction of their chair and committee. Students should successfully defend and submit their final thesis or professional project by the university's ETD deadline for the semester in which they intend to graduate.

Comprehensive Exams Track: Students should complete approved elective and/or directed/independent study coursework consistent with their approved plan of study and take the written and oral examinations during the semester in which they intend to graduate. The graduate program director serves as the primary program contact for the comprehensive exams process and provides guidance regarding related coursework, directed study, procedures and timeline requirements, with additional advising and registration support from the graduate academic adviser.

5.5 Annual Evaluation and Satisfactory Progress

All WVU graduate programs are required to provide a [yearly evaluation](#) of student progress. All graduate students enrolled in at least one credit hour during the academic year must receive a written evaluation from their program following the end of each spring term. This requirement may be waived for students in good standing who are expected to graduate and have completed, or are scheduled to complete, all final degree requirements.

The annual evaluation considers students' academic performance, progress toward degree completion and adherence to professional standards. Students with progress concerns may be required to meet with the graduate program director to develop a plan for returning to satisfactory progress. Insufficient or continued lack of progress may delay graduation and may result in action under applicable University academic standing policies.

Students who are not making adequate degree progress or who fail to uphold professional standards may be subject to [probation, suspension or dismissal](#). Academic consequences may also be imposed outside the routine annual evaluation process if an issue requires immediate attention.

6. Internships, Independent Studies and Teaching Practica

M.S.J. graduate students may complete selected individualized academic experiences as part of their degree plan, including internships for credit, teaching practica, professional field experiences and independent studies. Because these experiences require advance planning and approval, students should consult with the graduate academic adviser before submitting a course approval form to confirm that the proposed experience aligns with the student's plan of study and can appropriately apply toward the degree. These courses require departmental approval before students may enroll, and students must complete the applicable course approval process and form.

Approved 400-level coursework is subject to the program limit of [no more than 12 credits toward the M.S.J. degree](#).

6.1 Overview and Approval Process

The approval process varies somewhat by course, but students should generally:

1. **Identify and arrange** the proposed experience, placement or faculty-supervised study, as applicable.
2. **Consult with the graduate academic adviser** to determine how the experience fits within the student's plan of study.
3. **Obtain graduate program director approval** when required.
4. **Complete the appropriate School course approval form** before registering.

Students should not assume that an individualized experience will automatically apply toward the M.S.J. degree. Required advising and approvals should be completed before form submission and enrollment.

6.2 Individualized Course Options Requiring Approval

The following individualized course options are available to M.S.J. graduate students, subject to the applicable planning, approval and enrollment requirements outlined below.

MDIA 441: Internship

Students seeking academic credit for an internship may enroll in this course for 1–3 credit hours. The course is letter graded.

Students must secure the internship before completing the course approval form. The form requires information about the position, internship supervisor and expected responsibilities. Students should consult with the graduate academic adviser to confirm that the internship fits within the student's plan of study before submitting the form for School approval. Students who need assistance with internship or form requirements should contact Prof. Anjelica Trinone using the contact information provided in [Table 1](#).

Special considerations for international students: International students should consult with [WVU International Students and Scholars Services \(ISSS\)](#) well in advance of accepting or beginning an internship to determine their eligibility for [Curricular Practical Training \(CPT\)](#), [Optional Practical Training \(OPT\)](#) or other required authorization. Eligibility may depend on factors including the student's length of enrollment, degree progress and whether the internship qualifies as part of the student's academic program.

MDIA 490: Teaching Practicum

This 1–3 credit-hour course that provides supervised teaching-related experience, including serving as a teaching assistant, and is graded Pass/Fail.

Before completing the approval form, students should discuss the position and expectations with the supervising faculty member. Because the course is graded Pass/Fail, M.S.J. students must also receive prior approval from the graduate program director or designee before enrolling.

MDIA 491: Professional Field Experience

This variable-credit, supervised professional experience is graded Pass/Fail.

The experience must be arranged in advance. Students should identify the organization, field supervisor and expected duties before completing the approval form. Students should consult with the graduate academic adviser to determine how the experience fits within the plan of study. Because the course is graded Pass/Fail, M.S.J. students must also receive prior approval from the graduate program director or designee before enrolling. Credits applied toward the M.S.J. degree are subject to the program's limit on 400-level coursework.

JRL 595: MSJ Independent Study

This 1–3 credit-hour, letter-graded course allows graduate students to pursue faculty-supervised study of a topic not available through regular course offerings.

Students interested in completing an independent study should begin planning during the semester before the proposed independent study. The student must first identify a Reed School faculty member with relevant expertise who is willing to supervise the study. The student and supervising faculty member then develop the specific focus of the independent study, learning outcomes, weekly schedule or work plan, assignments or other deliverables, and grading criteria. Students should also consult with the graduate academic adviser to confirm that the independent study aligns with the plan of study.

The student must complete the [JRL 595 MSJ Independent Study eligibility form](#), and the independent study must be approved by the supervising faculty member and graduate program director before the student may enroll. At the start of the semester in which the independent study will take place, the supervising faculty member must also submit a syllabus documenting the agreed-upon course expectations and requirements by the School's syllabus submission deadline.

Individualized Course Options at a Glance

The following table summarizes the previously described individualized course options, including credit hours, grading mode, key approval requirements, and links to applicable course information and approval forms.

Table 2. Individualized Course Options and Approval Requirements

Course	Credits	Grading Mode	Key Requirements Before Approval	Approval Request Forms
MDIA 441: Internship	1–3	Letter Grade	For internships taken for academic credit. Internship must be secured before form submission; position, supervisor and responsibilities must be provided.	MDIA 441: Internship
MDIA 490: Teaching Practicum	1–3	Pass/Fail	Discuss position and expectations with supervising faculty member in advance. Prior graduate program director or designee approval required for MSJ students.	MDIA 490: Teaching Practicum
MDIA 491: Professional Field Experience	Variable	Pass/Fail	Experience, organization, supervisor and duties must be arranged in advance. Prior graduate program director or designee approval required for MSJ students.	MDIA 491: Professional Field Experience
JRL 595: MSJ Independent Study	1–3	Letter Grade	Begin planning during the prior semester; secure a Reed School supervising faculty member and develop the study focus, learning outcomes, work plan and deliverables before form submission.	JRL 595: MSJ Independent Study

7. Culminating Experience Options

To meet degree and graduation requirements, all M.S.J. students must complete an approved culminating experience: a thesis, professional project or coursework with comprehensive exams. The thesis emphasizes original scholarly research, while the professional project emphasizes substantial applied work informed by research. The coursework-with-comprehensive-exams option emphasizes advanced coursework and demonstrated mastery through written and oral examinations.

The selected option should align with the student's academic and professional goals, be documented in the approved plan of study, and be completed according to applicable program and University requirements. Students are expected to meet the applicable milestones and requirements for their selected culminating experience. Failure to do so may affect the student's annual evaluation and delay graduation. Students with progress concerns may be required to meet with the graduate program director to develop a plan for returning to satisfactory progress. Students must also remain in compliance with applicable [University academic and professional standards](#).

7.1 Thesis and Professional Project: Understanding the Difference

Students in the M.S.J. program may complete either a thesis or a professional project as the culminating experience, depending on their academic goals, professional interests and approved plan of study. Both options require graduate-level research, careful planning, faculty guidance, committee oversight, an approved proposal, successful proposal and final defenses, a written final document, and submission to [Electronic Theses and Dissertations \(ETD\)](#) by the applicable university deadline. Neither option is considered easier or less rigorous than the other. Rather, the two options demonstrate different forms of graduate-level mastery.

Thesis

The thesis is the traditional master's culminating experience and is designed for students who want to demonstrate their ability to conduct original scholarly research. A thesis requires students to identify a significant research problem or question, engage deeply with relevant scholarly literature and theory, use an appropriate research method, analyze evidence systematically, and explain how the findings contribute to knowledge in journalism, media, strategic communication or a related area of inquiry.

The thesis option is especially appropriate for students who want to pursue doctoral study, academic research, teaching, research-oriented professional work or deeper scholarly investigation of a media or communication issue. Thesis topics may involve a wide range of journalism, media, strategic communication or communication-related questions and may be addressed through appropriate scholarly research methods, including qualitative, quantitative, critical, historical, legal, textual, audience-based and content analysis methods.

A **thesis** typically emphasizes:

- Original scholarly research
- Sustained engagement with academic literature and theory
- Clear research questions, hypotheses or scholarly objectives, as appropriate
- Appropriate and systematic methodology
- Careful analysis and interpretation of findings
- Discussion of implications, limitations and future research
- Contribution to knowledge in the field

Students completing a thesis must submit the final thesis to ETD by the university deadline for the semester in which they intend to graduate. The thesis should include the written scholarly manuscript

and supporting materials approved by the student's committee. Supporting materials may include research instruments, interview protocols, coding sheets, data tables, figures, appendices, IRB documentation, consent materials or other materials necessary to document the research process and support the final manuscript.

Professional Project

The professional project is an applied graduate-level culminating experience designed for students who want to demonstrate advanced professional ability through a substantial media, journalism, strategic communication, creative, organizational or applied research project. A professional project addresses a significant professional problem, need or opportunity and results in a substantial, non-routine professional product or body of work that demonstrates advanced professional practice. A routine professional assignment or limited standalone deliverable generally does not provide sufficient scope for a professional project.

Although its purpose is applied rather than primarily scholarly, the professional project must be grounded in research. Students must conduct research to inform the project, explain the professional issue or opportunity the project addresses, document the planning and development process, complete the approved project and evaluate the completed work. The final written report should explain not only what was produced, but why it was needed, how it was developed, what research informed it, and what was learned through the process.

The professional project option is especially appropriate for students who want to produce a substantial applied work, such as a long-form reporting project, investigative series, multimedia documentary, video or audio project, public relations or advertising campaign, audience engagement strategy, media innovation project, applied research report, professional handbook or other approved professional product.

A **professional project** typically emphasizes:

- Applied problem-solving or professional production
- Research that informs the professional work
- Application of relevant concepts, theory or professional literature
- A substantial project, product, campaign, report or media outcome
- Documentation of process, decisions and execution
- Evidence of completion, implementation or dissemination
- Evaluation, reflection and implications for professional practice

Students completing a professional project must submit a final professional project document to ETD by the university deadline for the semester in which they intend to graduate. The document should include the written analysis and documentation of the project, the actual project or appropriate evidence of the completed project and supporting materials approved by the student's committee. Supporting materials may include project deliverables, campaign materials, published or unpublished work, media products, scripts, transcripts, production materials, research instruments, analytic materials, audience or professional evaluations, appendices or other appropriate evidence of completion.

Choosing Between the Thesis and Professional Project

Students should choose the culminating experience that best aligns with their academic and professional goals. A thesis is generally the stronger choice for students who want to conduct original scholarly research, prepare for doctoral study, pursue academic or research-intensive work, teach at the college/university level, or build deeper expertise in a research area. A professional project is

generally the stronger choice for students who want to demonstrate advanced applied, creative, journalistic, media or strategic communication work informed by research.

Students should discuss both options with the graduate academic adviser, graduate program director and potential committee chair before making a final decision. The selected option should be reflected in the student's approved plan of study and developed under the guidance of the student's committee chair and graduate advisory committee.

7.2 Coursework with Comprehensive Examinations

The comprehensive exams option is designed for students who want to deepen their knowledge through additional approved coursework and demonstrate graduate-level mastery through written and oral comprehensive examinations. Students complete coursework consistent with their approved plan of study and take the examinations during the semester in which they intend to graduate. The graduate program director serves as the primary program contact for the comprehensive exams process, with additional advising and registration support from the graduate academic adviser. Through planning and subsequent meetings, students receive guidance on examination expectations, timelines, preparation, assessment criteria, applicable forms and scheduling logistics. The graduate program director also assigns a faculty examining committee whose membership reflects the program's core curriculum and the student's approved area of concentrated study.

The written examination is proctored and conducted on campus. It assesses core M.S.J. knowledge, including theory, research and media ethics, along with an approved area of concentrated study based on the student's interests or another applicable program learning objective. After the written responses have been reviewed, the student participates in an on-campus oral examination with the faculty examining committee to discuss, clarify and elaborate on the written responses. Students must pass the comprehensive exams to meet degree and graduation requirements.

Table 3. Culminating Experience Options at a Glance

Option	Best Suited For	Primary Outcome	Key Requirements
Thesis	Students seeking the traditional research-based master's route and interested in doctoral study, academic research, teaching, professional work that benefits from advanced research and analysis	Original scholarly research study	Approved proposal, graduate advisory committee, research, six credits of JRL 697, written thesis, final defense and ETD submission
Professional Project	Students seeking substantial, research-informed applied work in journalism, media, strategic communication, creative practices or other professional areas	Completed substantial professional product or outcome plus a written report	Approved proposal, graduate advisory committee, research-informed project, six credits of JRL 697, written report, final defense and ETD submission
Coursework with Comprehensive Exams	Students whose goals are best supported by gaining additional breadth or depth through coursework and demonstrating graduate-level mastery through comprehensive examinations rather than completing a thesis or professional project	Demonstrated graduate-level mastery of the M.S.J. curriculum and approved concentration through written and oral comprehensive exams	Approved plan of study, additional coursework, assigned examining committee, written examinations and oral examination

7.3 Thesis and Professional Project Process Overview

Students pursuing the thesis or professional project option begin developing a preliminary proposal during Year One. By the end of the second semester, typically while enrolled in JRL 520, students should have completed the preliminary proposal and identified a prospective committee chair. Once the faculty member has agreed to serve as chair, the student should notify the graduate program director

and graduate academic adviser so the chair information can be reflected in the student's plan of study (see [Section 5.3](#)).

During the first semester of Year Two, students develop the full proposal under the guidance of the committee chair. The student then selects the remaining graduate advisory committee members in consultation with the chair. After the prospective members agree to serve, the student must submit the [M.S.J. Committee Request & Approval Form](#). The graduate program director reviews the proposed committee to ensure that its composition meets applicable University, College and program requirements and then communicates approval or disapproval, along with any necessary guidance.

Students completing the thesis or professional project option take six credits of JRL 697 Research, typically distributed across the two semesters of Year Two. [Section 5.4](#) provides the detailed progress benchmarks for both options. The following summarizes the overall process:

1. Develop the preliminary idea and preliminary proposal during Year One.
2. Identify and secure a committee chair, and notify the graduate program director and graduate academic adviser.
3. Develop the formal proposal during the first semester of Year Two under the chair's guidance.
4. Select the remaining graduate advisory committee members with the chair's guidance and obtain their agreement to serve.
5. Submit the [M.S.J. Committee Request & Approval Form](#) to the graduate program director for approval of the complete graduate advisory committee.
6. Provide the completed proposal to all committee members with at least two weeks for review before the proposal defense, unless the committee has agreed in advance to another review period.
7. Present and defend the formal proposal before the graduate advisory committee.
8. Complete any required proposal revisions before proceeding with the thesis or professional project.
9. Complete the thesis or professional project under the guidance of the chair and committee.
10. Provide the complete written thesis or professional project to all committee members with at least two weeks for review before the final defense.
11. Proceed with scheduling once the committee has tentatively deemed the written work ready for defense.
12. Schedule the defense and notify the graduate program director and office administrator of the defense details (i.e., date, time and location) by email, copying the committee chair. The office administrator can assist the student with scheduling a room for the defense.
13. Complete the final defense before the graduate advisory committee.
14. Complete all required revisions, obtain final approval from the chair, complete the required [WVU Libraries ETD Committee Signature Form](#) and submit the final work to ETD by the posted University deadline. The student must also provide a copy of the completed committee signature form to the graduate program director and office administrator for program records. Students can make a copy of the form in the main office (113 Martin Hall).

Additional guidance and document formatting requirements: Students should consult the [M.S.J. Thesis and Professional Project Steps and Guidelines](#) for a detailed overview of proposal components, final thesis and professional project document expectations and additional process guidance. Students should also consult with their chair or the graduate program director for additional details regarding components or requirements for their specific culminating option.

All final thesis and professional project documents must be prepared and formatted according to the required standards detailed in the [Formatting Guide to Prepare Your ETD](#) on the WVU ETD site. This resource provides information about the title and abstract pages, including templates; front matter (e.g.,

the table of contents); page-number formatting guidance; and instructions for the [WVU Libraries ETD Committee Signature Form](#).

7.4 Graduate Advisory Committee

WVU distinguishes between regular and associate graduate faculty. At least two of the three committee members, including the chair, must be regular graduate faculty. The external member must hold graduate faculty status.

Each thesis or professional-project graduate advisory committee consists of at least **three members**:

- One Reed School committee chair who holds regular graduate faculty status
- One additional Reed School graduate faculty member
- One external graduate faculty member from outside the Reed School

Students may consult the [Reed School Graduate Faculty](#) list to identify eligible internal committee members and the [University Graduate Faculty Members list](#) to help identify an eligible external member. Students select additional committee members with guidance from the chair. After the prospective members agree to serve, the student must submit the [M.S.J. Committee Request & Approval Form](#). The proposed committee must comply with applicable [University requirements for graduate committees](#) and [College of Creative Arts and Media Graduate Faculty Membership Criteria](#). The graduate program director reviews the proposed committee to ensure that its composition meets applicable University, College and program requirements, then communicates approval or disapproval and provides any necessary guidance.

Additional committee requirements and circumstances, including provisions related to emeritus faculty participation, are addressed in the [University requirements for graduate committees](#) and the [CCAM Graduate Faculty Membership Criteria](#). Students who need to change a committee chair or committee member, or who encounter committee-related problems, should consult the graduate program director for guidance and approval.

7.5 Proposal and Final Defense, Approval and Submission Requirements

Proposal Defense

At the proposal defense, the committee determines whether the proposal provides an appropriate and sufficiently rigorous foundation for the thesis or professional project. The student must complete any required revisions and receive committee approval before proceeding with the proposed work.

Research involving human participants must receive any required Institutional Review Board approval before data collection begins.

Final Document Review and Defense

Before the final defense is scheduled, the graduate advisory committee must determine that the completed written thesis or professional-project report is ready for formal review and defense. Once the defense is scheduled, the student must notify the graduate program director and Office Administrator Brenda Sisler of the date, time and location by email and copy the committee chair. Mrs. Sisler can assist with reserving a room for the defense. At the defense, the student presents and discusses the completed work and responds to questions from the committee.

Following the final defense, the committee votes to approve the thesis or professional project, often subject to required revisions, or to reject it. Approval requires a majority vote of the graduate advisory committee. One dissenting vote does not prevent approval.

Final Approval and ETD Submission

Following a successful defense, the student must complete all required revisions under the committee chair's direction. The chair determines whether the required revisions have been sufficiently completed and whether the final document is ready for [submission to ETD](#). The chair then notifies the committee that the required corrections have been made, and the student provides the committee with a digital copy of the final document. As a reminder, the student must also provide a copy of the completed [WVU Libraries ETD Committee Signature Form](#) to the graduate program director and Mrs. Sisler for program records. Copies can be made in the main office, if needed.

University ETD deadlines are strict. Students should schedule the final defense early enough to complete committee-required revisions, satisfy ETD formatting and documentation requirements and submit the final work by the applicable deadline. Students are encouraged to work with their chair and committee early to establish a realistic timeline that allows sufficient time for review, revisions and ETD submission without a last-minute rush.

8. Graduate Assistantships, Tuition Waivers and Student Financial Support

Graduate assistantships, tuition waivers, scholarships and limited research- and project-based funding may be available to eligible M.S.J. students. These forms of support are limited and subject to University and College policies, available funding, and the terms provided in the student's appointment or award notification.

8.1 Graduate Assistantships

Graduate assistantship duties and supervision vary by appointment. Students should follow the responsibilities, work expectations and reporting procedures established by their assigned GA supervisor and review the University's [graduate assistantship policies](#).

Students appointed as full-time graduate assistants in the M.S.J. program receive graduate assistantship tuition waivers, subject to the terms of their appointment and applicable university requirements. Graduate assistants [must maintain full-time graduate enrollment](#), **nine credit hours** during each fall and spring semester, even when fewer credit hours remain to complete the degree. The College generally does not permit graduate assistants to enroll below full time. Any exception must comply with [University requirements](#) and receive all approvals in advance.

Under College of Creative Arts and Media policy, graduate students enrolled in CCAM programs are [not eligible to receive tuition waivers for graduate assistantships outside the College](#). Students should consult with the graduate program director before pursuing or accepting an external graduate assistantship.

Special consideration for international students: International graduate assistants should review WVU's [international employee restrictions](#) and consult the appropriate university office regarding employment or enrollment requirements associated with their immigration status. F-1 and J-1 students are generally limited to 20 hours of on-campus employment per week while classes are in session.

Students should consult **Table 1. Who Do I Contact?** for graduate assistantship contract and payroll contacts.

8.2 Graduate Tuition Waivers

The College offers two primary forms of [graduate tuition waivers](#): graduate assistantship tuition waivers and merit tuition waivers. Waiver support is limited, competitive and dependent on available University and College funding.

To remain eligible for a merit tuition waiver, students must be admitted and enrolled as degree-seeking graduate students, remain in good academic standing, make satisfactory progress toward degree completion, and maintain a cumulative graduate GPA of at least 3.0. Merit waivers are awarded by semester, and renewal is not guaranteed beyond the period stated in the award notification. Graduate assistantship support and associated waivers are likewise not guaranteed beyond the dates specified in the appointment materials.

Graduate tuition waivers apply only to **University tuition**. Students remain responsible for **College tuition, University fees and any other charges not covered by the waiver**. Students should review current [tuition and fees](#) and applicable waiver terms. Merit tuition waivers may be adjusted when combined with other tuition-specific support. Coverage and conditions associated with graduate assistantship waivers are provided in the student's appointment materials.

8.3 Graduate Student Employment

M.S.J. students also may seek hourly campus employment as graduate student workers. Student positions are posted throughout the year through [Handshake](#) and may also be announced by individual university hiring units. Students are automatically added to Handshake after registering for classes but are responsible for completing their profiles and uploading required application materials. Job duties, work hours, compensation and other employment conditions are determined by the hiring unit. Graduate student worker positions do not include tuition waivers and may be located within or outside the College of Creative Arts and Media. Students may review the [Student Employment Resources](#) site and [101: An Introduction to Student Employment](#) resource for broader guidance about student employment at WVU.

8.4 Scholarships and Other Financial Support

Limited, competitive graduate scholarships, including some that support specific areas of study or professional interests, may be available to M.S.J. students. Eligibility requirements, award amounts and renewal terms vary by funding source and academic year. Students should consult with the graduate program director for information about current program opportunities and review [University-level graduate scholarships and internships](#) for additional possibilities.

8.5 Graduate Research and Project Support

Limited, competitive funding may be available to support student research, special projects and conference travel when a student's work has been accepted for presentation. Availability and award amounts depend on available funding and the nature of the request. Students should consult with the graduate program director for information about current funding options, eligibility requirements, required request materials and deadlines.

9. Time Limits, Graduation and Final Degree Clearance

Students may need additional guidance when their enrollment is interrupted, coursework exceeds applicable time limits or when they approach graduation. This section summarizes the M.S.J. program procedures related to time limits, revalidation, leaves of absence, final degree clearance and commencement participation and directs students to current University and College requirements and resources.

9.1 Time Limits and Credit Revalidation

Although the M.S.J. program is designed to be [completed in two years](#), master's students may continue in a program for a [maximum of eight years](#) following their term of admission. Graduate coursework applied toward the degree must also have been completed within the eight years immediately preceding the term in which the degree is conferred. Courses completed more than eight years before the term of degree conferral must be revalidated before they may be applied toward the degree. Students who have been inactive for two or more years or who exceed the eight-year program limit must also apply for readmission to the University and the M.S.J. program.

Revalidation is an individualized process used to confirm that a student has current knowledge and competency in the subject areas represented by expired credits. Depending on the courses involved, the process may include assigned readings, written work, examinations, portfolio review, presentations or other approved activities.

Students seeking revalidation must submit a written request and supporting materials to the School's associate director. The associate director reviews the student's academic record, may request additional documentation or an interview, and develops a written revalidation plan in consultation with appropriate faculty and program personnel. The approved plan identifies the work required, applicable deadlines and the student's remaining path to degree completion.

Revalidation requires a timely commitment from the student and may involve multiple faculty members, staff and administrators. Students must complete all assigned work and meet the deadlines established in the approved plan. Failure to do so may result in suspension of the revalidation process.

Additional policy details and procedures are provided by the associate director once the process is initiated.

9.2 Leave of Absence

The M.S.J. program follows the University's [leave-of-absence policy](#) for graduate students. Students in good academic standing who intend to be away from their studies for one or more semesters but plan to return may request a leave of absence.

Students wishing to apply for a leave of absence should first consult with the graduate academic adviser and then submit a written request by email to the graduate program director. When possible, the request should be submitted before the beginning of the semester for which the leave is requested. The graduate program director or designee determines whether to approve the request, the period covered by the leave, and any conditions the student must meet before returning. The decision is communicated in writing and retained in the student's program record.

Students should contact the program at least one semester before their anticipated return to allow time for advising, registration, course planning and support. Simply not registering does not constitute an approved leave of absence. Students also should not assume that an approved leave extends the University's eight-year time limit.

9.3 Graduation Application and Final Degree Clearances

Students must apply for graduation during the term in which they expect to complete all degree requirements. Students apply for graduation through STAR following the instructions provided on the [Office of the University Registrar's Graduation and Diploma web page](#). Students must apply for graduation even if they do not plan to attend the ceremony (a separate RSVP is required for the ceremony and is sent from the College). Students who do not complete the degree during the term for which they applied must submit a new graduation application for the later term in which completion is anticipated. For additional information about the primary actions and deadlines associated with graduation, visit the University's [Steps to Graduate page](#).

Students intending to graduate with multiple degrees, including ABM/4+1 students, or certificates must apply for each degree or certificate separately. *Information specific to ABM/4+1 graduation applications is provided at the end of this subsection.*

After the application has been reviewed and audited, students will receive an email from registrar@mail.wvu.edu stating whether the application has been approved or denied. Students should add this address to their contacts so the message is less likely to be filtered into spam or junk mail.

Office Administrator Brenda Sisler coordinates the School's final review of degree requirements and consults with the graduate academic adviser and graduate program director as needed. Mrs. Sisler is the primary contact for all final School-level graduation checks and 4+1 graduation-application questions. She also communicates with students about applying for graduation and other graduation-related matters. CCAM Director of Marketing and Communications Erica Lindsay communicates information about the College of Creative Arts and Media commencement ceremony, including the College Commencement RSVP Form. Students should monitor their WVU email for graduation and commencement reminders and other communication from Mrs. Sisler and Mrs. Lindsay.

The School verifies completion of all academic and culminating-experience requirements as a part of the final graduation review process. A degree cannot be conferred and a diploma cannot be issued until all degree requirements have been completed and the student has been cleared and [certified for graduation](#). Graduating students should also watch for and complete the M.S.J. Graduate Exit Survey when it is distributed near the end of the semester.

ABM/4+1 Note: Accelerated 4+1 students who have completed both the undergraduate and graduate programs of study must apply for both degrees. These students must email Brenda Sisler at brenda.sisler@mail.wvu.edu to request a PDF copy of the undergraduate graduation application. This PDF process does not apply to regular graduate students (i.e., those who are not ABM/4+1 students).

9.4 Final Culminating Experience Requirements and ETD

Students must complete all requirements associated with their track and culminating-experience pathway before receiving final graduation clearance.

Thesis and professional-project students must complete the written document, oral defense, all required revisions, and properly prepare and format their final document prior to submission to [WVU's Electronic Thesis and Dissertation](#) system. Students should ensure that the final ETD acceptance notice is sent to the graduate program director and office administrator, who records ETD acceptance as part of the final graduation check.

Students completing the coursework with comprehensive exams track receive written notice of the results of their written and oral examinations under the guidelines and timelines established by the program and communicated by the graduate program director. The graduate program director provides

the final decision to the School's office administrator for the student's record and final graduation review.

Students must enroll for [at least one graduate credit](#) during any term in which they use University research facilities or consult with graduate committee members. This requirement includes students completing a thesis or professional project and those working with the graduate program director, their advisory committee and/or assigned faculty on the written and oral comprehensive examinations.

9.5 Commencement Participation and Regalia

Participation in commencement is separate from degree conferral and does not necessarily indicate that all degree requirements have been completed. The [University's graduation website](#) is the primary resource for current commencement information, including ceremony details, graduate instructions and regalia guidance. Students should also review the [CCAM graduation page](#) and watch for School and College announcements for ceremony dates, RSVP instructions and other requirements. Students who miss a College commencement RSVP deadline should follow the current directions provided on the CCAM graduation page.

Graduate students must purchase [official WVU academic regalia](#) before commencement. Required regalia includes the cap, gown, tassel and graduate hood. Regalia is not sold at the commencement venue. The academic color for the M.S.J. is crimson. Students should consult the University's current regalia information and [academic color guide](#) before placing an order.

10. Student Resources and Campus Support

The following directory connects M.S.J. students with key University, College and Reed School resources. Consult the linked sites for the most current information about available services, requirements and contact information.

Table 4. Student Resources and Campus Support Directory

Area	Official WVU Resource	Purpose and Use
Graduate Education and Student Life	Graduate Education and Life	Access graduate-specific information, resources, programming and support related to academics, funding, professional development and graduate student life.
	Graduate Education and Life Resources	The resources page also serves as a directory for other University and community services.
Graduate Student Concerns and Conflict Resolution	Graduate Student Ombudsperson	Seek confidential, independent, informal and neutral assistance when navigating concerns, difficult situations, University processes or conflicts involving graduate education.
Academic Integrity	WVU Policy on Student Academic Integrity	Review University expectations, rules and procedures related to academic integrity and academic misconduct.
Student Accounts, Billing and Financial Aid	WVU Hub	Find information and assistance related to financial aid, scholarships, billing, payments, refunds and student accounts.
Graduate Financial Support	Graduate Education and Life Financial Support	Explore graduate-specific financial support, including loans, emergency assistance, external funding opportunities and other sources of support.
Academic Records, Registration and Calendars	Office of the University Registrar	Access information about registration, academic records, transcripts, graduation and DegreeWorks.
	Registrar Calendars	Consult official academic calendars for term dates, registration periods and deadlines.
WVU Portal and Online Student Systems	WVU Portal	Access STAR, DegreeWorks, eCampus, MIX email and other authenticated WVU systems and services.
Technology Support	Information Technology Services Student Resources	Find assistance with WVU Login credentials, two-factor authentication, University systems, software, connectivity and other technology needs.
Libraries and Research Support	WVU Libraries: Support for Students	Access research materials and assistance, schedule consultations with librarians, get help with citations and locate subject- and course-specific research guides.
Graduate Writing Support	Eberly Writing Studio: Graduate Students	Receive writing support and consult resources designed for graduate-level academic, professional and research-related communication.
International Student Support	International Students and Scholars Services	Obtain official guidance concerning immigration status, visa documentation, international student requirements, arrival and travel matters and related concerns.
Accessibility and Accommodations	Office of Student Accommodations	Request and manage approved academic accommodations and access information about disability-related services, documentation and accessibility resources.
Health, Counseling and Well-Being	WVU Student Health	Access medical care and other student health services.
	Carruth Center for Counseling and Psychological Services	Access counseling, psychological services and mental health support.

Area	Official WVU Resource	Purpose and Use
Food and Basic-Needs Support	The Rack: WVU Student Food Pantry	Access food assistance and related support available to currently enrolled WVU students.
Human-Subjects Research and IRB Support	Office of Human Research Protections	Find guidance, requirements, templates and submission resources for research involving human participants and Institutional Review Board review. Students should consult their committee chair before beginning the IRB process.
Student Legal Support	Student Legal Services	Seek legal information, counseling, advice and, when appropriate, representation concerning eligible personal legal matters.
Professional Development and Career Support	Graduate Education and Life Professional Development	Access graduate-focused workshops, training and professional development opportunities.
	WVU Career Services Center	Access career-planning resources, employment tools, career events and individual career support.
CCAM Clubs and Student Organizations	CCAM Clubs and Student Organizations	Explore College and Reed School organizations that support professional interests, leadership, networking and student involvement. Because the directory includes organizations from across CCAM, students should identify those relevant to their academic and professional interests.
Reed School Experiential Learning, Student Media and Research Opportunities	Martin Hall Agency	Explore opportunities to gain applied experience in advertising, public relations and strategic communication through student-run agency work.*
	Reed School Broadcast Programs	Explore student media and broadcast opportunities, including WVU News, Mountaineer Playbook and West Virginia Today.*
	Public Interest Communication Lab	Explore research and applied work in public interest communication.*
	<i>* Participation, eligibility, course requirements and availability may vary by opportunity and semester.</i>	

11. Forms, Guidelines and Reference Documents

The following table provides convenient access to the current primary forms, guidelines and reference documents used in the M.S.J. program. All have been linked in previous sections but are provided here for easy access. Students should review the applicable handbook section and consult the appropriate program contact before submitting a form or completing a required process.

Table 5. Commonly Used M.S.J. Forms, Guidelines and Reference Documents

Form or Document	Purpose or Use	When Needed
<u>MDIA 441: Internship Form</u>	Requests approval to enroll in an internship for academic credit.	After securing the internship and before registering for MDIA 441.
<u>MDIA 490: Teaching Practicum Form</u>	Requests approval for a supervised teaching practicum, such as serving as a teaching assistant.	After arranging the practicum (TA position) with the supervising faculty member and before registering for MDIA 490.
<u>MDIA 491: Professional Field Experience Form</u>	Requests approval for a supervised professional field experience.	After arranging the experience and before registering for MDIA 491.
<u>JRL 595: MSJ Independent Study Eligibility Form</u>	Documents the proposed independent study, faculty supervision and planned course requirements.	During the semester before the proposed independent study, after developing the plan with the supervising faculty member and before registering for JRL 595.
<u>M.S.J. Committee Request & Approval Form</u>	Requests graduate program director approval of the proposed thesis or professional project committee.	After all prospective committee members have agreed to serve and before the proposal defense.
<u>M.S.J. Thesis and Professional Project Steps and Guidelines</u>	Provides detailed guidance on proposals, committee review, defenses, final documents and ETD submission.	Throughout the thesis or professional project process.
<u>WVU Formatting Guide to Prepare Your ETD</u>	Provides required formatting instructions and templates for the final ETD document.	While preparing the final thesis or professional project document for submission.
<u>WVU Libraries ETD Committee Signature Form</u>	Documents committee approval of the final thesis or professional project for ETD submission.	After the final defense and completion of required revisions.